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PL 15-7

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

DATE: March 6, 1972

PLACE: Chancery of São Paulo, Brazil Catholic Archdiocese

PARTICIPANTS: Dom Benedito Ulhoa Viera, Auxiliary Archbishop and Vicar General of São Paulo

George E. Brown, Political Officer, American Consulate General, São Paulo

Dr. Louis Marengo, Member Board of Intelligence Estimates, Washington, D. C.

Joseph D. O'Connell, Jr., USIS, on detail to the Consulate General's Political Section

SUBJECT: Church-State Relations

BRASILIA

AMB
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RIO
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CF-2

BELEM
P ALGRE
S PAULO2
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SALVADOR

The Bishop said that the church's relations with the regime "appeared" relatively tranquil compared with the first nine months of 1971, but in fact the regime's hostility towards the church was deeper now than at any time since the Revolution. Most of the top military leaders in the regime were convinced that the church was supporting communism and subversion and that its views on social questions were dangerous. When the church protested against torture and other mistreatment of prisoners, this served only to reinforce these suspicions. The Bishop mentioned, as he has on other occasions, the "cold, even harsh and bitter" attitude of President Medici towards Archbishop Arns during their meeting in Brasilia some eight months ago.

This attitude towards the church was not limited to the President; it was widespread throughout the current regime. To illustrate he recounted a confrontation he had had with Operation Bandeirantes (the combined

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security operation in São Paulo) only the week before. Five students from São Paulo's Catholic University had been arrested by the security forces and their families denied rights of visitation. The families asked the university to inquire about the students' whereabouts but the university authorities were brushed aside. The university then turned for help to Archbishop Arns, who sent Bishop Ulhoa to the headquarters of Operation Bandeirantes to find out about the students. There, where the students in fact were being held, the Bishop was told their whereabouts was unknown. The Bishop went a second time and on this visit demanded to see the commanding officer. After some resistance, he was told that he would be allowed to see the commander, but that he was to refer to him only by the code name of "the doctor"; he could not be told "the doctor's" real name for security reasons. The commander finally appeared, and in a loud, insulting voice asked the Bishop what he wanted. Bishop Ulhoa began to explain, but was soon interrupted. The commander began to shout at the Bishop that the church was "defending communists and hampering the work of the nation's security forces." The Bishop shouted back that the church was not interested in defending communists, but only in defending human rights and justice. The Bishop then asked the commander if the students had been tortured, and the commander answered that no torture went on in his jail. The Bishop then asked if it might not be possible for torture to take place without his knowledge, just as, the Bishop added, many things could occur without his knowledge in the three hundred parishes under his responsibility. The commander replied that this was theoretically possible. The Bishop suggested that the two meet again to continue their dialogue, but the commander refused. He did agree to give the Bishop his code name and phone number so that the Bishop could communicate directly with him should the need arise. The Bishop did not see the students, and according to him they are still being held incomunicado. The newspapers have so far not published anything concerning the arrests.

To further illustrate the attitude of the security forces, the Bishop recounted another incident. In late November 1971, Andres Antonio, a 19 year old citizen of El Salvador who worked for the Latin American Bishops' Conference (CECLA) in student affairs, was arrested in São Paulo and tortured before being released. Antonio had been in Chile on CECLA business during the recent visit of Fidel Castro to that country. From Chile, Antonio went to Montevideo, but the Uruguayan authorities would not permit him to enter the country. Instead, they put him on a flight to São Paulo and apparently alerted Brazilian officials. On his arrival in São Paulo his baggage was thoroughly searched and several "subversive books and papers" were found. Meanwhile, the CECLA office in Montevideo,

having learned that Antonio had been sent to Brazil, called the São Paulo chancery to find out what had happened to him. On inquiry, both the airline and Brazilian officials denied any knowledge of Antonio. At the same time, the CECLA office in Montevideo requested the assistance of the Vatican in locating Antonio, and the Vatican got in touch with Bishop Ulhoa through the Nuncio in Rio. The church in Montevideo also sent a messenger to Bishop Ulhoa with a statement from the Uruguayan Ministry of the Interior stating that Antonio had been put on a plane for São Paulo, and a copy of the flight's passenger list, including the young man's name. Bishop Ulhoa presented this evidence to Brazilian authorities, demanding to know Antonio's whereabouts. But the authorities continued to deny any knowledge of him. Later, while taking the Papal Nuncio in Brazil to the São Paulo Cathedral, the Bishop found Antonio there waiting for him. The police had released him for lack of evidence, telling him to "go and find your good friend the Bishop." Antonio gave a full report to the Papal Nuncio. He had been held for eight days, and tortured by the police. The Bishop said he himself saw the marks on Antonio's wrists, ankles and neck. The Bishop assisted Antonio in getting out of Brazil a few days later. Antonio subsequently was called to Rome to report to the Vatican on his arrest and treatment by the Brazilian security forces.

The Bishop said that, rather than diminishing, political repression and torture were increasing in Brazil. Even the techniques of torture had been refined and had become more scientific. The security forces were controlled by men who believed that the end of maintaining a communist-free Brazil justified any means; they looked upon the church as a defender of communism, hence an enemy of national security. He had recently gained confidential access to a "lengthy secret report" on the church prepared by the Second Army and initialed on each page the Commanding General, Humberto Souza e Mello. The burden of the report was that the church was aiding and abetting communism.

The "fascist" attitudes of those in power prevented any kind of acceptable relationship between the regime and the church. There was not even the possibility of a dialogue with the regime. Cardinal Eugenio Salles, Archbishop in Rio, had sought such a dialogue at the national level, but had come away frustrated. Now "even Cardinal Salles understands" the kind of regime we have in this country, the Bishop said. The church must look upon the present government as a "threat" and within the clergy and among the bishops there was great solidarity in facing this threat. It was the church's role to educate Brazilians, particularly the younger generations.

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in Christian traditions in the hope that in the long run government in Brazil might become more humane in its practices and outlook. In the short run the church was limited in what it could do; it could hope only to avoid further deterioration. Archbishop Arns had given instructions to priests in the archdiocese to avoid provocations.

Comment: This was one of a number of conversations we have had with Bishop Ulhoa over the past year. On this occasion we found him more bitter and hostile towards the government, including the top leadership, than at any other time.

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